



Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council

Chairman's Annual Report 2021-22

After surviving almost two years of lockdown restrictions via Zoom meetings the council itself became a COVID victim through the loss of councillors Danny Seddon Roberts and Hermann Moisl, by resignation and lapse respectively, both of whom served the council loyally up to then. Their presence has been missed.

We were obliged by law to meet in person in May but agreed that we should do so in the open whilst risks of infection remained high. Consequently, the meeting dealt only with financial formalities and concluded within half an hour. It was, however, a beautiful evening and pleasant to meet one's colleagues again in person.

For want of business and difficulties with the hall as a venue we cancelled the July meeting.

The September meeting was beset by problems of quoracy: only three councillors being in attendance.

Consequently, although we were able to transact some ordinary business, petitioners regarding an objection to a proposed Certificated Camping site at Skelsmergh Hall were disappointed that we were unable to vote due to a declaration of interest.

Due in some measure to the COVID restrictions the council has been limited in its initiatives but one bright spot was reported in the form of Joseph Rigby's Public Rights of Way Survey as part of his community service for the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award. There is now a data base from which much-needed way-marking and repairs can be initiated as follow-up to the Community Plan. We were pleased to congratulate Joseph in person at the November meeting.

Our other community activity, the Litter-Pick on 24th October, was well-supported and yielded 20-25 bags. More Ash trees were felled in the Woodland and hazel was coppiced there and in Coldharbour Quarry Woodland (off the A6), providing several days pleasant volunteering for locals and friends. Though small, these woods are steadily enlarging their environmental impact as they mature.

COVID also affected our January meeting: Rev. Rogers was advised not to attend and Mick Crozier, who had put his name forward for the council, was self-isolating.

We received a report from Cllr Pat Bell regarding progress towards the new unitary authorities and Cllr Hazel Hodgson who had supported our appeal to Cumbria for resources for Public Rights of Way. It was also agreed that representations be made to the responsible public bodies about the severe consequences of power outages in the wake of Storm Arwen and of the need for local contingency plans.

After due debate it was agreed that the annual precept be raised by 3.5% (£170, in cash terms) to allow a small provision for contingencies.

With the departure of Cllr Moisl we found ourselves without a web-master and we were very thankful that Karen Little moved swiftly and decisively to secure an alternative provider with only days to spare before our subscription lapsed. The new web-site is being steadily built-up from scratch and would benefit from new local images to enliven it.

With some relief we finally welcomed to our March meeting new resident Mick Crozier from Garth Row who agreed to fill one of our councillor vacancies. It still leaves two seats unfilled and I repeat here the call for candidates to put themselves forward.

We also welcomed Rev. Tricia Rogers, who leads the Beacon Team of allied local churches. It was useful to exchange ideas on matters of mutual concern of which maintenance of the graveyard is a regular item of expenditure. Storm Arwen felled a tree which needed specialist care to remove and Cllrs readily voted additional grant-aid to pay for it.

A second application for grant-aid came from the Community Hall committee with a request for funds towards a Platinum Jubilee gate for the field, to be commissioned from a local metal worker. Cllrs. were readily persuaded that this would be an appropriate use of funds to demonstrate whole-community involvement in the project. Prior to this an audio-visual system, recently installed by the committee, was demonstrated. This should prove to be a valuable facility for all manner of hall users in the future.

Some fifteen planning applications were received during the year, most being unobjectionable. It was, however, considered appropriate to make representations about potential light-scatter from Carus Green's alterations to their driving range and to call for deeper landscaping provision for the new Meadowbank Business Park on the parish boundary, north of Kendal.

On a final sad note we have been advised by Karen Little that she intends vacate the post of clerk, which she has so expertly filled since January 2014, at the end of the coming financial year (when the council will be up for election). I am grateful for her advance warning and note that one of the first business matters for the coming year will be to advertise for a successor to allow plenty of time for the appointment and handover.

On that somewhat sombre note I conclude this report by thanking my fellow councillors for their commitment to our community, to Lynda Barron for her continuing support with the internal financial audit process, and to Karen for her patience, support and encouragement.

Councillor John Chapman

Chairman, May 2022.